

U.S. National Security Decision Making--The Process

Lesson Objective: Comprehend the basic political infrastructure and the bureaucratic process involved in determining U.S. national security strategy and policy.

Desired Learning Outcomes:

DLO 1. Summarize the rivalry and disagreement that lie at the core of national security decision making. (pp147-148)

Intrabrand and interbranch rivalry and disagreement are at the core of foreign and national security decision making.

That different individuals and groups within the executive branch and the Congress will disagree on elements of policy, and even on how policy is made, reflects both the importance and conscientiousness of the foreign policy enterprise.

If foreign and defense policy were peripheral and inconsequential, there would be no need for an interagency process, an ongoing interbranch wrangle over the power to commit troops to conflict, or a reform process to reshape the national security community.

The disagreements are not limited to the halls of government. Indeed, outside the formal lines of authority, there is a series of groups whose purpose it is to influence how and what the government does.

DLO 2. Outline the eight basic steps to support orderly and systematic interagency coordination. (pp 160-162)

- Define The Problem In Clear and Unambiguous Terms That Are Agreed To By All
 - Differences in individual assumptions and organizational perspectives can often cloud a clear understanding of the problem
 - The early development of options for interagency consideration is necessary
- Define the Objective
 - Commanders and decision makers should seek clearly defined, decisive, and attainable objectives, end state, and exit criteria
 - Not all agencies will necessarily understand or agree to the need to clearly define the objective with the sense of urgency or specificity of military planners
 - The diversity is the strength and not the weakness of the interagency process

- Establish a Common Frame of Reference
 - The semantic differences commonly experienced between Services grows markedly in the interagency arena. To mitigate this problem, military planners must anticipate confusion and take measures to clarify and establish common terms with clear and specific usage.
- Develop Courses of Action or Options
 - Military planners should focus their efforts on the military enabling capabilities that contribute to national security policy objective attainment and are part of the interagency plan of action
- Capitalize on Experience
 - Review the after-action reports and lessons learned of other organizations
- Establish Responsibility
 - When all participants in the interagency process understand what needs to be done, agree upon the means to accomplish it, and identify who will do what through policy-operations coordination, a common sense of ownership and commitment toward resolution helps achieve unity of effort
 - Careful responsibility and accounting procedures should be established
- Plan for the Transition of Key Responsibilities, Capabilities, and Functions
 - It is imperative to plan for the transition of responsibility for specific actions or tasks from military to nonmilitary entities
 - As campaign and operations plans are developed at the operational level, effective transition planning should also be a primary consideration
- Direct All Means Toward Unity of Effort
 - The principle of unity of effort pertains not only to military operations but also to interagency coordination

DLO 3. Advocate an actively engaged role for the U.S. military as part of the “interagency” process and why this is important. (pp 165-168)

The interagency process determines the national interests at stake, defines the immediate- and long-term objectives, and considers the best ways of achieving ends with minimal

risk. The process is the mechanism which drafts, coordinates, and assesses national strategy and oversees its implementation. The military must remain engaged to ensure its voice is heard and to ensure the key players, lead agencies, etc. do not wait too long before employing military capabilities. The military should also educate the other civilian agencies as to its capabilities and limits of power. The military also needs to be educated on the interagency process to ensure other agencies that may contribute to a solution have not been left out.

DLO 4. Describe the two decision-making models and their usage in leaders' making assessments toward determining national security. (pp169-170)

Rational Actor Model: Each state is viewed as a unitary actor, and each calculates by what means it can best achieve its objectives. It does this in four steps: (1) selecting objectives and values; (2) considering alternative means of achieving them; (3) calculating the likely consequences of each alternative; and (4) selecting the one that is most promising. This model is central to first-level analysis. It underlies not only analyses of international politics and specific foreign policies but also other spheres of decision making. In the competitive games nations play, with their informal rules, each player creates a strategy designed to lead to victory. There are usually several options, and players must decide at points during the game which play is the best in terms of the ultimate goals. This model is usually used during crisis and initial policy formulation.

Governmental Politics Model: This model focuses on the executive branch of government, especially on the bureaucracies that have the official responsibility to formulate and execute foreign policy. This model is usually referred to as the bureaucratic politics model. It includes the executive branch, the legislature, at least in free countries, as well as interest groups, the mass media, and the various publics that together constitute public opinion. The emphasis is on the pluralistic nature of decision making in which, in general, the actors' views reflect their organizational positions and interests. Policy in these circumstances is formulated through conflicts among many actors with different perceptions, perspectives, and interests, but also through reconciling these differences. This method is used during non-crises policy development.

DLO 5. Distinguish the characteristics of crisis decision making from non-crisis decision making.

Crisis Decision Making (pp 170-173):

A crisis can be characterized as a situation in which (1) decision makers are taken by surprise; (2) they feel that they must make decisions rapidly; and (3) they perceive that the nation's vital interests are at stake.

A crisis exists at the crossover point between peace and war: if the international system is defined as a system in a state of potential warfare, then at the moment of crisis that potential threatens to become a reality. Moreover, the possibility of escalation to war

becomes ever greater as the crisis goes on.. The fear of war drives policy makers to act quickly to resolve the issues before the crisis gets out of hand. Time is therefore of the essence.

Four Characteristics of Crisis Decision Making:

- Rise of Decision Making to the Top
 - The need for quick decisions in crises limits the number of officials that can be involved. The perception that vital interests are at stake quickly centralizes decision and takes it to the top—the first characteristic of crisis decision making.
 - The various characteristics of a crisis listed above tend to be highly functional in creating a process leading to rapid policy decisions.
 - The policy process works speedily, free of the traditional domestic pressures, for the short duration of the crisis.
 - The fact that crisis decision flow upward to the top officials has another important consequence: the careful and cautious management of crises. A crisis results in stress and anxiety. There is always the possibility that of rash or impetuous actions. Policy makers may not examine all the options and may choose the wrong one because some officials are reluctant to express doubts about the policy being adopted.
 - Conformity can be expected within a relatively small circle of leading officials because there is a great deal of pressure to go along, to “groupthink”. “Dovish” views tend to be suppressed within a group when the members are trying to impress one another with their toughness.
 - The more cohesive the group, the greater the is the member’s inclination to reject a nonconformist. The greater the desire to remain in the group, the more likely is an individual with doubts about a proposed policy to suppress them and go along with the majority.
- Central Role of the President
 - A second characteristic of crisis decision making is the central role of the president, who interprets events and evaluates the stakes in the crisis.
 - The consequences of a crisis and a president’s political future and ability to lead the nation cannot be separated. External challenges, as the president sees them, do not allow a loss of personal prestige without a loss of national prestige. Presidents see personal and national cost calculations as identical.

- Role of the Bureaucracy

- The third characteristic of crisis decision making is the subordination of bureaucratic interests to the “national interest”. The crisis is accompanied by a sense of urgency, as well as by policy makers’ perceptions that the nation’s security is at stake and that war looms.
- Decision making rises to the top levels of government. People in those positions reflect their departments’ points of view, although they do not necessarily feel limited to representing only those points of view. Organizational affiliation is not a good predictor of what these individuals might say. Senior participants in crises behave more like “players” than like “organizational participants”.
- The bureaucracy’s principle role in a crisis is carrying out the policy. This especially applies to the military because the threat of force, if not some limited application of force, surfaces quickly in such a confrontation.
 - The risks of war by inadvertence are real. No one wants war, but loss of control in the implementation phase of a crisis may well provoke an unintended escalation. It is, therefore, imperative that in such situations presidents ensure that their political goals remain primary and that military operations do not jeopardize them (i.e., Air Forces proposed surgical strike plan during Cuban missile crisis could have led to a misinterpretation by the Soviets and an escalation of hostilities if it had been used by Kennedy).

- Role of Congress

- Decision making in a crisis is characterized by congressional noninvolvement. Congressional leaders are called in and informed of the President’s decision just before it is announced publicly.
- There is usually not sufficient time to develop criticism and opposition because another characteristic of a crisis is its brevity. Time is the critical factor, however, if the crisis does not end quickly then congressional opposition may grow.
- There may be period of solidarity at the beginning of a crisis or hostilities, but the support will erode the longer the crisis or fighting lasts, especially if casualties mount.
- In brief, congressional involvement in crises is simply a matter of time.

Non-crisis Decision Making (pp 174-179)

Seven Characteristics of Non-Crisis Decision Making:

- Multiple Actors

- Multiple Institutional Actors (the three branches of government): In foreign policy matters, the principal participants are the executive and legislative branch. This institutional pluralism is supplemented by organized groups representing many economic, ethnic, racial, religious, and public interests, but
- Non-crisis decision making is characterized by multiple institutional actors—the three branches of the federal government. In foreign policy matters, the principal participants are the executive and legislative branches. This institutional pluralism is supplemented by organized groups representing many economic, ethnic, racial, religious, and public interests who overall tend to be less involved in security policy than in domestic/intermestic affairs.
- The main differences between foreign and domestic policy making are that domestic policy involves more participants in both the executive and legislative branches and receives more attention from interest groups.

- Conflict

- Conflict occurs primarily within the executive branch, among executive departments that are responsible for formulation and implementation of foreign policy.
- Conflict between the executive and legislative branches of government also occurs—in fact the two rarely speak with a single voice. Conflict also occurs within departments
- Each institutional, bureaucracy, committee and interest group develops a strong organizational identification and all are determined not only to survive, but also to expand their influence in the policy-making process. Each seeks to maximize its contribution since each feels that its expertise is critical to defending or advancing the nation's interests. This kind of policy-making process is often condemned as “parochial” on the assumption that more comprehensive –more “correct”—solutions to all policy problems could be found were it not for the selfish and narrow points of view of the various participants in the policy process.
- The issue is not which policy positions and recommendations are correct because there is no single correct policy. The issue is how to *reconcile* conflicting interpretations of what the correct policy ought to be.

- Consensus Building

- Reconciliation of differing points of view to build a consensus or majority coalition so that decisions can be made is required. The approach is to widen the

base of support within the executive branch by seeking support from officials and agencies in another department, then seeking further support in both houses of Congress.

- Policy is not only a matter of which point of view seems to have the most merit and pertinence, although that certainly is important, but also a matter of who has power and exercises it most effectively.
- Incrementalism and Crisis
 - One of the most important results of the continual bargaining within the “policy machine” is that policy in any area moves forward one step at a time and tends to focus on fleeting concerns and short-term aims. This result is usually called incrementalism.
 - Policy makers do not go through the rational procedure of decision making every time they need to make a decision. They have neither the time nor resources to go through this process. Instead, they pick a policy that was successful in the past and take it another step forward to apply it to a new situation. The presumption is that what worked well in the past, will work now, as well as in the future.
 - Incrementalism has advantages. It allows policy makers to adjust policy to changing circumstances; it also permits retreat in policy if the incremental change does not work. It avoids brawls and struggles within the policy-making community.
 - Policy tends to vacillate between incrementalism and crisis, either because incrementalism is not adequate to a developing situation or because stalemate produces no policy at all, which may allow a problem to become a full-blown crisis.
 - There are two policy processes: the pluralistic advocacy system and the crisis management system, the latter involving top officials (assistant secretaries and up), the former a broader mix of interests.
- Need for Time
 - Policy making is a time consuming process. Incrementalism suggests a policy machine in low gear, moving along a well-defined road rather slowly in response to specific short-term stimuli.
 - Proposed policy is discussed first within the executive branch. It passes through official channels, receiving clearances and modifications, on its way up the hierarchy to the president. Conferences and negotiations among departments slow the pace.

- The process takes even longer if it requires extensive congressional participation and approval. The advantage of this slow process will lie with those who oppose the legislation. This process is applied more to domestic policy than to foreign policy because of the president's greater responsibility and freedom to make foreign policy.
- Appealing Packaging and Shared Images
 - A premium is placed on the attractive packaging and promotion which arises from the competition among groups involved in the policy-making process. Rather than presenting complex and sophisticated reasons for a particular policy position, proponents sometimes try to make it more acceptable by oversimplifying the issues, tying their "product" up with a pretty moral ribbon, and selling it by insisting that it will definitely solve the buyer's problems. In so doing, the sellers may exaggerate the problems to persuade the buyers they must accept the policy product being offered.
 - More specifically, the commonly shared assumptions on which decision makers operate—their shared biases or images—help determine which decisions are made.
- Public Debate
 - In a democracy, public involvement is inevitable. Although policy may be made primarily by the executive, its limits are established by public opinion.
 - In general, public opinion tends to be permissive and supportive as far as presidential conduct of foreign policy is concerned.
 - Mass opinion usually takes shape *after* some foreign event has occurred so it rarely serves as a guide for those who make policy.
 - Until after the Vietnam War, Congress usually supported the president's foreign policy. The situation changed since Vietnam, as Congress, reflecting the erosion of the previous cold-war consensus, became more skeptical of presidential wisdom in foreign policy and more assertive on international issues.
 - Particularly important since the Vietnam War, is the shift in the role of the media from communicating and explaining official policy to questioning and criticizing policy.

DLO 6. Summarize the impact of the landmark Goldwater-Nichols Act in relation to U.S. national security policy. (pp 183-189)

- To reorganize DOD and strengthen civilian authority
 - G-N leaves no doubt as to the authority of “the SECDEF to have sole and ultimate power within the DOD on any matter on which the SECDEF chooses to act.”
 - In designating the Chairman as the principle military advisor, he has become an ally of the SECDEF with a common department-wide, nonparochial perspective
 - G-N specifies the responsibilities of the service secretaries vis-a-vis the SECDEF
- To improve the military advice provided to the President, National Security Council, and the SECDEF
 - G-N made the Chairman the principle military advisor, transferred duties to him previously performed by the corporate Joint Chiefs, and assigned new duties. To assist him, Congress created the position of the Vice Chairman. Congress also gave the Chairman full authority over the Joint Staff.
- To place clear responsibility on the commanders of the unified and specified combatant commands for the accomplishment of missions assigned to those commands
 - G-N prescribed the chain of command as running from the President to the SECDEF to the CINC. The Joint Chiefs including the Chair were explicitly removed.
- To ensure that the authority of commanders of unified and specified combatant commands is fully commensurate with the responsibility of those commanders for the accomplishment of missions assigned to those commands
 - G-N specified the command authority of the CINCs by addressing the command functions of giving authoritative direction, prescribing the chain of command, organizing command and forces, employing forces, assigning command functions to subordinate commanders, coordinating and approving aspects of administrative and support, selecting and suspending subordinates, and conventional courts martial.
- To increase attention to strategy formulation and contingency planning
 - G-N requires the President to submit an annual report on the national security strategy
 - G-N instructs the Chairman to prepare fiscally constrained strategic plans

- G-N requires the SECDEF to written policy guidance for the preparation and review of contingency plans
- G-N prescribes a role for the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy in assisting the Secretary in his work on contingency plans.
- To provide for the most efficient use of defense resources
 - G-N provided the Chairman with six new resource-related duties. Two of the most important were advising the SECDEF on priorities for combatant command requirements and on how well the programs and budgets of the military department and other DOD components conformed with strategic plans and CINC priorities
- To improve joint officer management policies
 - G-N established procedures for selection, education, assignment, and promotion of joint duty officers
- To otherwise enhance the effectiveness of military operations and improve DOD management and administration
 - G-N required the SECDEF to delegate supervision of each defense agency and field activity to an OSD official or the Chairman. The Chairman's role as an overseer of the unified commands also helped lessen the SECDEF's supervisory burdens

DLO 7. Advocate the need for a possible Goldwater-Nichols II. (p191-194)

The Goldwater-Nichols Act enormously improved DOD's conduct of military operations and the management of defense resources. However, some assessments have revealed weaknesses on the administrative side of DOD which have been magnified by post-Cold War security challenges.

- Excessive Bureaucracy
 - The defense bureaucracy is too large. The Pentagon has reduced force levels by approximately 25% and defense manpower by 31% since the end of the Cold War. The defense bureaucracy has not been cut proportionately.
 - The service component commands of unified commands also need to be reviewed. Several serve as components of more than one unified command. Their continued existence needs to be reviewed to ascertain if there is not a better way to oversee

logistics and other support for operational forces and to provide a service perspective to unified commanders.

- DOD must reduce the overhead of numerous duplicative staffs in both its administrative and operational chains of command.

- Response to New Mission

DOD's reaction to new missions is too slow. This lack of adaptability is rooted in its organizational structure. Each HQ staff in the Pentagon is organized along traditional lines with manpower, intelligence, logistics, and other functional activities. This structure does not adjust well to new missions.

- Ambiguous Responsibilities

- The assignment of administrative responsibilities among OSD, the Joint Staff, and military department staffs is too ambiguous. Too many organizations duplicate the work of others.

- Management by Policymakers

- The involvement of defense policymaking staffs in management activities is too extensive.
- The emergence of nontraditional missions has also added to OSD management burdens. This workload does not fit into a single military department. As a result, the workload has been assigned to OSD offices.
- Diverting policymaking organizations to management duties creates a twofold problem. First, management tasks—which tend to be more visible and urgent—come to dominate organizational activity and the more cerebral policymaking receives less attention. Second, direct involvement in managing or overseeing an activity makes it difficult for policymakers to maintain their objectivity in recommending policies to govern that activity.

- Narrow Security Organization

- The organizational concept for national security is too narrow. Today's security challenges require integrating the activities of many departments and agencies, some not traditionally viewed as contributors to national security.
- A second dimension of interagency woes is that DOD, especially the Joint Staff, has long held other agencies at arms length.

- The interagency process will continue to experience shortcomings until all contributors to national security are prepared to play their roles. Turning to internal DOD reorganization, the Secretary should consider assigning elsewhere those direct management tasks currently performed by OSD and the Joint Staff. A more rational approach of managing defense-wide activities combined with refocusing OSD on policymaking would strengthen Pentagon performance in the long run.

Questions for Study and Discussion:

1. U.S. policy making has become so politicized; the apolitical nature of the past has become contentious. Why?

There are three possible reasons why the two branches come into direct conflict.
(pp 129)

- Members of Congress perceive that their constituencies are directly and adversely affected by foreign or national security matters
- Executive overreach or the so-called imperial presidency. The president is most prominent in his dealings with foreign policy and foreign dignitaries. Depending on the individual and how he includes Congress in foreign dealings, the appearance of haughtiness, even disdain can creep into the relationship.
- Congress becomes activist when it believes that executive is mishandling foreign affairs. Sometimes, the motivation is partisan and political. At other times, the motivation can arise from a genuine belief that executive action is both wrong politically and has potentially erosive effects on the political system.

2. Of the eight steps to better coordination which would be the most crucial?

Defining the objective in terms of clearly defined, decisive and attainable objectives, end state, and exit criteria is the most crucial. Successful interagency coordination is essential to achieve these goals and the development of accurate and timely assessments. Such definition allows for the application of resources of the most appropriate agencies.
(pp160)

3. Why is military advice often not sought by civilian leadership when determining national security policy?

American strategic culture holds that military force is a last resort. Some policymakers consider the use of force as an admission of foreign policy failure. As a result, force is regarded as a separate instrument that is somehow incompatible with other means. This perception of military power undermines efforts to achieve a more synergistic application of national power today with increasing frequency before as well as during crisis. (pp 164)

4. What is the usefulness of having a model for decision making?

It can harness the power of disparate organizations with competing priorities and procedures. (pp 169) *(17) can be used in defining other countries policies*

5. What is the value of knowing how non-crisis decisions are made in a bureaucracy?

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If you do not understand the basic steps in how non-crisis decisions are made or know who the players are, you (or your agency) will not be able to influence the process or use it. (pp

6. Goldwater-Nichols requires the yearly publication of a national security strategy; what actions then follow? (pp 187)

- It instructs the Chairman to prepare fiscally constrained strategic plans
- It requires the SECDEF to give written policy guidance for the preparation and review of contingency plans. This guidance would provide the political assumptions for planning.
- It prescribes a role for the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy in assisting the SECDEF in his work on contingency plans.

7. What future trends within defense are most crucial?

The most crucial trends seem to continued ambiguity of responsibilities which often results in duplicative work, excessive bureaucracy, and response to new missions. These things must all be changed for DOD to become more effective. (pp191-194)

slow